



Bud Harris, Ph.D.

“Bud Harris is a lantern on the path – clear eyed, big hearted, and illuminating.”  
—Julia Cameron, author, *The Artist’s Way*

# SACRED SELFISHNESS

A GUIDE TO LIVING  
A LIFE OF SUBSTANCE

**SACRED  
SELFISHNESS**

BY BUD HARRIS

*Our Lost Manhood:*

*How to Reclaim the Deeper Dimensions of Your Masculinity*

*The Father Quest:*

*Rediscovering an Elemental Psychic Force*

COAUTHORED WITH MASSIMILLA HARRIS

*Like Gold Through Fire:*

*Understanding the Transforming Power of Suffering*

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## CHAPTER 8 (excerpt) Befriending Our Dreams

*During the day, our souls gather their . . . impressions of us, how our lives feel. . . . Our spirits collect these impressions, keep them together, like wisps of smoke in a bag. Then, when we're asleep, our brains open up these bags of smoke . . . and take a look.*

—Marsha Norman

Catherine, the heroine in Emily Bronte's passionate classic *Wuthering Heights*, says, "I've dreamed in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas: they've gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the color of my mind." Dreams, we know, speak to us in the "other voice," the voice of poetry and symbolism, the voice that puzzles us because it isn't the recognizable, familiar voice of our rational, literal selves. If we are seeking to know ourselves then we must be willing to listen to our dreams, to see how *knowing with* this other voice can teach us about ourselves and help us live more completely.

Befriending a dream means letting it simmer in our minds, listening to its poetry, looking at its images and reflecting on them. Befriending a dream means allowing ourselves to feel its moods, the dramatic energy of its scenes, and the intensity or lightness of its characters and story line. Befriending is a kind, personal way of explaining how to relate to our dreams. It is a gentle process summarizing how we pay attention, listen, question, and reflect upon dreams. Growing familiar with our dreams in this manner is an honest route toward understanding our inner worlds.

In his profound book *Insearch: Psychology and Religion*, James Hillman tells us the messages in our dreams show how our inner worlds are seeking to become known and befriend us. He says we need to wonder, "Who lives in me? What inscapes are mine? What is recurrent and therefore what keeps coming back to reside in me? These are the animals and people, places and concerns, that want me to pay attention to them, to become friendly and familiar with them. They want to be known as a friend would. They want to be cared for and cared about. This familiarity after some time produces in one a sense of at-homeness and at-oneness with an inner family which is nothing else than kinship and community within oneself."

Dreams as friends are our allies and the advocates of our living with awareness and integrity. Sometimes they speak to us in straightforward ways as I experienced not too long ago in a short dream that stood out clearly. When the dream opened I was in the examining room of a doctor's office. In the room with me was a white-coated physician who had just given me a physical exam. I felt pleased because I knew that I ate well, exercised regularly, and was in good physical condition. To my surprise the doctor said, "You're going to be sick." I was so startled by his pronouncement that I woke up. Within a couple of days I came down with a particularly rugged virus that was coursing through our community at the time, followed by the secondary complications of a bacterial infection that eventually became pneumonia. In retrospect, I imagine my friend was trying to help me prepare for experiencing something that was already underway in my body.

We generally think it's rare for dreams to be direct and explicit, but there are many of these exceptions. Musicians, for example, whether they're popular composers like Billy Joel or classical composers such as Mozart, Beethoven, or Wagner, have acknowledged that the inspiration for their music and often the specific sounds come to them in their dreams. Thomas Edison disclosed that an image of his dead brother came to him in a dream with instructions for designing the electric lightbulb. Simply paying attention and listening to dreams bring their meanings within our grasp.

Other dreams speak to us in a more subtle manner. Recently I

dreamed I was attending an elegant dinner party with close friends. As the dream opened we were entering an exquisite Oriental-style restaurant, one whose nationality I couldn't determine. A courtly, refined maitre d' showed us into the dining area, where waiters in formal white jackets helped us take our seats at tables of golden bamboo covered with white linen tablecloths. My friends and I were dressed in dark suits, though they weren't people I know in real life. The conversation was warm, cordial, and humorous. Accompanying us was a woman I'd known as a little girl when I was an adolescent. In the dream she was the same age as the rest of us and very charming and attractive. The food was beautifully arranged on a large side table, and the aroma was wonderful.

It was a lovely dream, but with no direct message. In fact it was more of a sensual statement than a clear message or a story. The dream seemed to invite me to enjoy its mood and images, and I've savored them many times in my spare moments. I've let this dream "simmer" in my imagination, remembering the smells, the elegance, the courtesy and style of the waiters, the warmth and charm of the room, and the quiet pleasure of being with friends.

As I've mulled over the dream I realize that everything in it was new, exotic, colorful, and inviting. In a sense even the woman was new. I've wondered what she might represent, perhaps some part of me that has been dormant for years. But my intuition has been to enjoy this dream and delight in the pleasure it offered me rather than to try to formally interpret it. While I was reflecting on it one evening an old saying came to mind: No matter how exciting growth and change may be, we often find that there's a long hallway between leaving a comfortable, old state of being and arriving in a new one. Suddenly I understood the dream's purpose because I was in the midst of struggling through a major change in my writing style that often left me frustrated and disappointed. The dream reassured me that I wasn't alone in that hallway. I was with friends, inner friends.

Poetically speaking, dreams are like friends. One friend may give us directions, another one may provide comfort and companionship or fun. But good friends do more than that; they also confront



us, show us where we're getting in trouble, and get angry with us when we don't listen to them or show them the respect they deserve. Frequently our dream friends communicate with us in story form with a beginning that sets the context for the story, a middle that shows how the story develops, and an end that brings a resolution or a release.

When a dream comes in story form, we need to listen to it as a story and see its action as a dramatization of the story. Where and how it begins orient our perspective. Whether we're in our childhood homes, in a bathroom, on a battlefield, in our marriage beds, or floating down a river sets up very different kinds of stories. The people in the dream are the characters in the story, and we should pay careful attention to them—who they are, what they're doing, and how they fit into the story line. And whether we're observers or participants in the action is an important point to note and reflect upon. Then, of course, we need to look at how the plot develops and whether it includes a problem or crisis that leads to a climax, reaches a solution, and then ends; or if it simply trails off or ends by awakening us.

I remember a brief, but helpful dream story that came to a man seeing me a few years ago. Jack was middle-aged and had been struggling with depression and marital conflicts for several years. Jack dreamed that he was strolling down the street with his wife one evening. As they walked they left the well-lit, comfortable neighborhood they lived in and became lost in what appeared to be a ghetto undergoing urban renewal. The streets became darker and they walked faster but couldn't find their way out. The buildings were old and ramshackle, but seemed to be in the process of being remodeled. Jack was becoming frightened. Suddenly a large, brutish-looking man ran out of an alley and began furiously smashing the windows of the remodeled buildings with a large iron bar. Jack awoke terrified.

When we're looking at dreams like this one, we need to keep in mind they have a purpose, they want to lead us into new realizations or offer us a fresh point of view on how we're dealing with life. In Jack's case, his dream has a clear opening scene with him and his

wife, and as it unfolds you quickly sense the story building. It seems that dreams like this one want to push their way into consciousness and press us into action.

As he initially reflected on it, Jack thought the dream was talking about his marriage and how it was progressing into darker areas. He also wondered if it had always been impoverished and if he was trying to renew its "facade" because he thought it was the "right thing to do" rather than it being something in which he had invested his heart. However, the challenge of the dream was in trying to understand the large, angry man. After thinking about it for a while Jack remarked, "This man scares me. I suppose part of the message of this dream is that I have to wake up to this part of myself and figure out how I am going to get to know him."

While Jack's line of thinking about the dream made sense, I cautioned him to continue letting it "simmer" in his mind, reflecting on it, musing over it, and writing in his journal about it. As he continued this process he discovered that the dream generated deeply felt thoughts and memories related to his marriage and to how as a child he'd been taught to deal with conflict. This work helped him feel his situation more intensely and orient himself more clearly. The results of his efforts helped Jack act with increased certainty and experience less distress.

Another guideline to remember about dreams is they frequently have many different meanings. If we try too hard to boil them down, to reduce and extract from them one clear interpretation, we may lose some important information. For example, you might be able to see other meanings in Jack's dream than the ones he saw. Thomas Moore compares a dream to a Monet landscape and says it may "mean" something different to each of the various people contemplating it. In a similar manner Jack's dream may evoke different reactions in him every time he considers it. The meaning to Jack of this one dream may evolve for years as he reflects upon it from different perspectives. You can imagine that every time Jack thinks about his marriage in terms of the dream, he'll see it differently. And the more he considers this brutish man in himself, wonders who he is and how he can know him better, Jack will in fact be changed. In

## SACRED SELFISHNESS

actuality, the more Jack reflects upon this angry man, the more his former view of himself as an easygoing guy who doesn't get angry will begin to soften and shift. Befriending the dream will alter the "color" of how he sees himself.